



Defining
EXCELLENCE
in the 21st Century

Veteran Connection

VA Portland Health Care System Newsletter

Keeping the Promise - Advancing Excellence



VA Portland Health Care System

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Produced by the VAPORHCS
Public Affairs Office

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS ??

Please email us at...

VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov

or call 503-402-2975

Lincoln's Promise (VA Mission Statement)

*"To care for him who
shall have borne the
battle, and for his
widow, and his
orphan" by serving
and honoring the men
and women who are
America's Veterans.*

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For [VAPORHCS Events and
Classes](#)—got to the VAPORHCS
Web page...

www.portland.va.gov/calendar.asp

Message from the Director



Todd D. Burnett, PsyD
Acting Director, VA Portland
Health Care System

Thank you to the Veterans and family members who were able to join me, the Acting Director of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Portland Regional Office Carol Roane, and a number of our staff members on May 26 for our Veterans Town Hall. It was a rather small but inquisitive group who also shared very helpful personal insight on services and processes that we can now take a closer look at to see about improving across VAPORHCS. Our next town hall will be scheduled sometime in August—we hope you can join us in Vancouver for the event there or at one of six clinics where we share it via video teleconference.

Town Halls are just one of several tools we use to engage our customers and receive feedback on the services and programs we provide in our health care system. Each month myself and VBA Portland Regional Office leadership meet with our VSO Committee where we provide short updates or briefings on various topics and listen to issues, concerns and ideas from them on behalf of the constituents they each serve. Every month the discussions at these meeting prove to be very educational for all involved. This is a very inclusive group and if you belong to an organization that supports and/or

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represents Veterans and would like to send a representative, please reach out to our Public Affairs Office to get more details. We would love to have you as part of the conversation and solution to improve Veteran care.

We also gain very useful feedback from hundreds of customers through Veteran experience surveys that are distributed and collected by both a contracted company (Press Ganey) and internally within the VA system (SHEP— Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients). In addition, our service departments periodically put together focus groups to look at very specific areas to gain input on current services and/or to help us develop new processes.

The VAPORHCS 12-member all-volunteer Veterans Family Advisory Board (VFAB) is one of our key tools to advise us on health care related issues. The team just completed their 12th month since inception and has been exceptionally helpful in providing a voice for the Veterans and family members we serve.

I am convinced that Veteran feedback is key to the success of our mission to deliver exceptional care and I thank all those involved in sharing their experiences with us.

To provide ideas and feedback, please send them to my Public Affairs team at VHAPOR-publicaffairs@med.va.gov.

Thank you,
Todd D. Burnett

If you would like to be added to the VAPORHCS Partner email list, please email us at VHAPOR-PublicAffairs@med.va.gov



Have Questions about VA Medications or Pharmacies?

The ‘Ask a Pharmacist’ mobile app can help

Starting this month, the VA is launching a new app called *Ask a Pharmacist*, which gives Veterans easy access to trusted VA sources for information on VA medications and pharmacies.

Ask a Pharmacist helps Veterans answer basic pharmacy and medication questions, such as “where is my nearest VA pharmacy located?” or “how can I identify my pills by sight?” Veterans can also access the app on any mobile device, making it easy to have their questions answered quickly.

“With Ask a Pharmacist, Veterans have VA pharmacy and medication information at their fingertips,” said Dr. Eric Spahn, Pharm D., a VA Pharmacist with VA Pharmacy Benefits Management, who has been instrumental in the app’s development. “Putting all of these resources in one places means Veterans have quick and convenient access to the information that they need when they need, and they know it’s reliable and comes from sources they can trust.”

The app also provides a direct link to certain resources within My HealtheVet, VA’s personal health record, for Veterans with Advanced or Premium My HealtheVet accounts. Any Veteran who receives VA health care is eligible for a My HealtheVet Advanced account, which allows them to sign up to refill prescriptions online. In addition to prescription refill, Veterans with a Premium Account can also use Secure Messaging to communicate with their VA care teams. [Visit My HealtheVet to learn more about how to obtain or upgrade a My HealtheVet account.](#)

Additional information and supplemental materials for the Ask a Pharmacist App can be accessed on the VA App Store at mobile.va.gov/app/ask-a-pharmacist. For more information about available VA Mobile Apps, visit mobile.va.gov/appstore.

**For questions, call the Help Desk at 1-877-470-5947
weekdays between 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. CT.**



Frequently Asked Questions

Ask a Pharmacist App

Q: Who can use the Ask a Pharmacist App?

Anyone can access the informational resources about medications in the Ask a Pharmacist App. However, to use some of the features the Ask a Pharmacist App helps you learn about, you must be a Veteran receiving VA care and have an Advanced or Premium [My HealtheVet](#) account. My HealtheVet offers three account types:

1. **Basic Account:** Anyone can register for this account type. It allows you to self-enter your personal health information, which can be viewed or downloaded using the VA Blue Button. You may use the journals and other tools to track your health measures. However, you cannot view your personal information located in VA or Department of Defense (DoD) systems.
2. **Advanced Account:** This account is only for Veterans/VA Patients. It is a higher level of access that may provide you the ability to view and refill your VA medications online. This account does not require that you have your identity authenticated*. Having an Advanced account paves the way for you to get a Premium account.
3. **Premium Account:** This is the highest level of access to My HealtheVet features for Veterans/VA Patients. To get this type of account you need to complete Authentication*.

A **Premium Account** allows you to:

- view part of your official VA health record;
- participate in Secure Messaging with your VA health care team and other VA staff ;
- view your DoD Military Service Information (if available in DoD's electronic records).

You will have to log into My HealtheVet with your My HealtheVet User ID and Password to use the many features within the site. The Ask a Pharmacist App allows you to easily link to features within My HealtheVet, but does not duplicate them or allow them to operate within the app itself.

*Authentication means you are verifying your identity.

Q: What are the app's main features, and how do I access them?

A: The app offers easy access to tools and information to better inform you about VA pharmacies and medications, which are divided into categories on the Home screen:

- Prescription Refill and Pharmacy Services
- Pill and Bottle Information
- VA Trusted Medication Resources
- About VA Pharmacies
- Send a Secure Message

To access the **Ask a Pharmacist** App tools and information, go to the Home screen, and tap the tab of the information you would like to view or the tool you would like to access.

Traveling?

Let's put the pieces together to coordinate your care away from home

VA Health Care

Take it with you on extended travel

VA is committed to providing first-class health care to our Veterans, whether you are at home or traveling. If you are enrolled in the VA health care system, you should contact your Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) or Specialty Care Provider as soon as possible when you are traveling or temporarily experiencing a change of address — such as living in one state during the winter and another during summer — to ensure a smoother experience, if health care is needed along the way at an alternate VA facility.

In order to help VA ensure you receive consistent care while you are traveling, we ask that you:

- notify your PACT or Specialty Care Provider, preferably 4 to 6 weeks prior to your departure, or as soon as you are aware of the trip.
- plan early to allow time for PACT and the Traveling Veteran Coordinator to coordinate your care at an alternate VA facility
- inform your PACT of the following:
 - travel destination(s), and temporary address
 - a valid telephone number
 - arrival and departure dates
 - specific care concerns

For more information, contact your PACT. Your PACT will consult with the Traveling Veteran Coordinator at your local VA facility to manage your local VA facility to manage your care at an alternate VA facility.



For more information,
contact the
VAPORHCS
Traveling Veteran Coordinator

Catherine Couey
(503) 273-5174
Catherine.Couey@va.gov

Supporting aging Veterans — Geriatric services at VAPORHCS

By Phillip Myers

Public Affairs Volunteer / Writer

Confronting the process of getting older, for many people, is often a debilitating challenge. The geriatric practice within VAPORHCS provides a variety of assistance with these challenges through a cadre of medical professionals who specialize in the ailments often encountered during the aging process. VAPORHCS can lay claim to being one of the first VA facilities in the country to initiate a geriatric program under the auspices of Dr. John Walsh in 1978.

One of the leaders in the VAPORHCS geriatrics program is Dr. Sarah Goodlin who has been with the VA for more than five years, although she has focused on geriatrics since 1987 in a variety of settings, including the VA, private practice and health care systems.

Dr. Goodlin and her associates offer counsel to primary care providers who encounter Veterans that require assistance with problems associated with aging. “Typically, we encounter Veterans who are in their late 70s through their 90s that present with complex medical problems or geriatrics syndromes such as cognitive impairment, falls, immobility, and incontinence,” said

Dr. Goodlin who works with six geriatric physicians at the Portland VA campus.

Dr. Goodlin who is also a co-chair of the VISN20 Dementia Committee, along with Dr. Stephen Thielke, said, “Cognitive impairment is more common among Veterans than the general population. In VISN20, 25 to 29 percent of primary care Veterans

has dementia, or a high risk for the condition.”

In 2011, Dr. Goodlin partnered with geriatric neurologists and geriatric psychiatrists to develop a collaborative dementia program that provides diagnosis and management and

educational resources for Veterans and their families.

In addition to cognitive impairment programs, Dr. Lisa Miura, in conjunction with the VAPORHCS physical therapy department, developed a fall assessment clinic. Balance problems that result in falls are a cause for concern. These problems, associated with physical frailty, are sometimes related to cognitive impairment.

VA Geriatrics and Extended Care Services (GEC) is designed to optimize the health and well-being of Veterans with multiple chronic conditions, life-limiting illness, frailty or disability associated with chronic disease, aging or injury.

“We try to determine what is causing balance problems. Certain medications could be a factor and sleep aids might cause impairment,” said Dr.

Goodlin. “There are certain diagnostic tests that can lead to answers and help prevent falls. Leg exercise is the most important treatment.”

Growing older means the prospect of related maladies,



Dr. Sarah Goodlin, VAPORHCS Chief of Geriatrics.

Geriatric Services (continued)

not all of which are debilitating. Aging associated problems, among others, include eye disorders, prostate cancer, sleep disorders, depression, hearing disorders and incontinence. Solutions to many of these problems are being addressed thanks to dedicated VAPORHCS staff, resulting in longer life spans and quality of life.

When Veterans are faced with end-of-life situations, an interdisciplinary Palliative Care team offers palliative care, along with a hospice unit located at the Vancouver campus. “Conversations with Veterans and loved ones about advance care planning are very important,” said Dr. Goodlin. “We try to integrate planning for the future into all our care.”

Dr. Goodlin said that the patient ratio of aging Veterans is increasing and that fact often presents challenges for her team. “We will never have enough geriatricians to care for everyone who ages, so we provide consultative care to primary care providers.”

All the VAPORHCS geriatric physicians have faculty positions at OHSU. The VA provides 40 percent of the funds required to facilitate teaching for OHSU medical students and residents, and geriatrics plays a role. The OHSU and VAPORHCS’ Geriatric Medicine Fellowship is one of the oldest in the country. It began in 1978. The Fellowship has trained 88 geriatricians, and helped to create a strong tradition of geriatric care in the Portland metropolitan area.

Emphasizing the need for qualified medical professionals in the geriatric field is illustrated by a recent article in the Wall Street Journal that stated: “A shortage of physicians is a real threat. By 2030 the population of Americans 65 or older will surpass 70 million, according to a 2008 report from the Institute of Medicine. Many of them will have chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes or osteoporosis. Unless action is taken immediately, the health care workforce will lack the capacity (in both size and

ability) to meet the needs of older patients in the future.”

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Goodlin, her associates and primary care providers, those needs are being assuaged in large measure for Veterans who come to VAPORHCS for help.

VA Geriatrics and Extended Care

Resources on the Web

www.va.gov/GERIATRICS



- Geriatric Patient Aligned Care Team (GeriPACT)
- Shared Decision Making
- Guide to long term services and support
- Home and Community Based Services
- Residential Settings and Nursing Homes
- Advance Care Planning
- Well-Being

VA & Social Security Administration team up for the Veterans Health Information Exchange

VAPORHCS is one of ten VA sites that are in the pilot testing phase for a shared tool with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to help speed up the VA claims process for Veterans. This tool will only apply to those Veterans who have an electronic authorization on file with the SSA. With technology SSA will be able to query and retrieve health information from VA through the eHealth Exchange rather than going through the manual release of information (ROI) process; it completely automates the process. For those familiar with the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) eHealth Exchange, this follows much of the same process, but rather than the exchange being for treatment purposes it is for disability determination (coverage is the purpose of use).

This process is being tested at VA facilities in Gainesville, Bay Pines, and Orlando, Fla; Dallas, Houston, and Temple, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; Atlanta, Ga; Puget Sound, Wash.; and Portland, Ore. One hundred patients (10 per VAMC) have been selected of which all of these patients have an [SSA-827](#) on file (Authorization to Disclose Information to SSA). Starting this summer, a request will sent through eHealth Exchange for those patients. Initially, 10 out of the 100 patients will have their content reviewed by SSA. They estimate the initial review will take about two weeks. If the findings of this initial review look good, then a subset of the remaining 90 patients will also have their content reviewed. This second content review phase is estimated to take 2-4 weeks. So, altogether a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the start of a national rollout if all goes well with testing.

The purpose of this initial content review is to determine whether the information available through

the eHealth Exchange is sufficient

enough for the claims adjudication process in most of the cases. If it is, this would speed up the claims process since SSA will not have to wait for medical centers to manually compile and send over health information. Instead, they will be able to retrieve the information real-time through the eHealth Exchange. Once rolled out nationally, in cases where the information retrieved does not provide enough for the claims adjudication or they need something specific that is not included in the standard documentation that is sent via the eHealth Exchange, SSA will still have to go through the standard ROI process for that additional documentation. Any information disclosed through the eHealth Exchange will be tracked through the Veterans Authorizations and Preferences (VAP) application just like the other eHealth Exchanges are captured today. Sites have the ability to run an accounting of disclosures report from within VAP.

Connect Your Docs



VLER Health
Virtual Lifetime
Electronic Record

One view of your health history
... wherever your care was provided

For more detail on VLER, go to the VAPORHCS Web site at...

[www.portland.va.gov/services/
Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record
VLER](http://www.portland.va.gov/services/VirtualLifetimeElectronicRecordVLER)

Filmed at the [Portland VA Epilepsy Center of Excellence \(ECoE\)](#), video series is now available on [Veterans with epilepsy](#)

In an effort to address the stigma of epilepsy and educate Veterans, their caregivers and the general public about living with epilepsy, the Epilepsy Centers of Excellence (ECoE), in partnership with EES, has developed a video series titled, “Veterans and Epilepsy: Basic Training.” The third video in this series focuses on psychosocial issues and is now available on YouTube.

“One of the most common complaints voiced by Veterans living with epilepsy is that of the sense of loss: loss of control, independence, identity and self-worth” says Jan Spencer, neurology social worker at the VA Portland Healthcare System, Portland, Oregon.

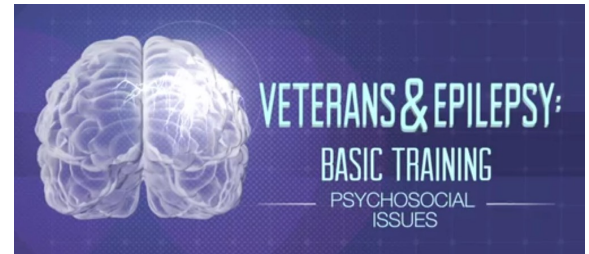
“Uncontrolled seizures can occur at any time with little or no warning, leaving Veterans feeling vulnerable, limiting their ability to drive, to seek meaningful work and experience satisfying relationships. It is our goal at ECoE to help every Veteran find positive ways to cope with the challenges of living with epilepsy, to regain a sense of self and restore a quality of life fitting for those who have sacrificed so much for all of us.”

Each video in the [“Veterans and Epilepsy: Basic Training”](#) series features a Veteran sharing his or her personal experiences and unique challenges balancing the medical, personal and social aspects associated with having recurring seizures. The goal of the video series is to promote public awareness of the impact of epilepsy in the lives of Veterans and to convey that these patients are able to live full, productive, successful lives. Subsequent videos will be released every few months over the next year and include topics such as anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) and seizure first aid. Viewers can also check the YouTube playlist for recent and future videos in this series (administrative note: When clicking these links, you will leave a VA-hosted website. These links are for informational

purposes only. VA

does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked website).

To meet the needs of Veterans suffering from epilepsy and related psychosocial issues the VA created the Epilepsy Centers of Excellence, located at 16 sites across the VA health care system that are organized into four regional centers. The ECoE’s mission is to improve the health and well-being of Veterans with epilepsy and other seizure disorders through the integration of clinical care, outreach, research, and education.



**Veterans and Epilepsy
Basic Training
- A 3-video series -**



1. [Epilepsy and TBI](#)
2. [Diagnosis](#)
3. [Psychosocial Issues](#)